

PROFILE/NATHAN HOKAMA Special to The Hawaii Herald

TAKING NOTES ON DR. HENRY YOKOYAMA

The Hawaii Medical Journal's News Editor

A notepad in one hand, and a pen, golf club, or tennis racket in the other—that's the trick to finding Dr. Henry Yokoyama on the greens or on the court. No, he's not keeping score. Nor is he writing a prescription in a doctor's stereotypical chicken scratch.

Instead, the mild-mannered physician, who turns 68 on October 6, is probably carefully jotting down notes which may seem incongruous for someone like him, things like the latest gossip about other physicians, or a raunchy joke. "Wherever I go, I take my notepad," said the general practitioner whose office is located in the Kuakini Medical Plaza. "I have to write it down otherwise I don't remember."

Yokoyama has edited the Hawaii Medical Journal's "News & Notes" column for the past 27 years. The Journal is a publication of the Hawaii Medical Association, a non-profit, professional organization of 1,800 physicians, medical residents, and medical students from throughout the state. Yokoyama succeeded Dr. Sam Allison as the column's editor in 1964. He says the notepad and pen routine is one means of gathering material for his monthly column. The content of his columns has also contributed to its popularity.

Yokoyama, who has been practicing medicine for 34 years—including four as a physician with the City Health Department—was among the honorees at the Hawaii Medical Journal's 50th anniversary celebration. The event was held at the Hawaii Medical Library on grounds of The Queen's Medical Center earlier this month.

"The comments I receive bring the most satisfaction," said Yokoyama of the column. Although it includes obituaries and notes from physician's conferences, "they (readers) especially like the Playboy (magazine) type jokes. They're not plagiarized; other physicians tell them to me." The column also features ethnic jokes which Yokoyama says come from people of that particular ethnic group.

The journal has nearly 2,000 subscribers worldwide. Yokoyama admits he's had his share of mixed reviews. "A British physician from



Dr. Henry Yokoyama with the Hawaii Medical Journal's editor, Dr. Frederick Reppun. (Photo Courtesy of the Hawaii Medical Journal)

Nairobi once wrote a critical letter that it was not proper for a medical journal to have such jokes," he told the 60 invited guests at the journal's celebration.

Lighten up, says Yokoyama. "As physicians, there are too many serious things to think about. Life is too serious for physicians." The column presents a lighter side to some of the other heavier subjects in the journal, such as toxicology, living will legislation, and other health care issues. The column is also a way "to get 'togetherness' among physicians . . . we don't always communicate with each other."

Yokoyama received his bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan in 1951 and his medical degree, also from Michigan, in 1955. That year he returned to Hawaii to intern as a surgical resident at Queen's Hospital, earning \$75 a month.

The Journal's founding editor, Dr. Harry Arnold, Jr., enjoyed Yokoyama's column. A former Straub Clinic dermatologist, Arnold served as the Journal's editor for 40 years. He moved to San Francisco eight years ago, where he died August 13, just weeks before the 50th anniversary celebration. Many associated with the journal had hoped he could be at the celebration. The evening's speeches revealed fond

memories of him as a insatiable reader and editor.

In response to Yokoyama's invitation to join the celebration, Arnold, who at the time was undergoing radiation therapy for cancer, wrote: ". . . It was a great pleasure and privilege to have you as a member of the editorial staff with your lively, readable Notes & News all those years, Henry! Any editor should be so blessed! I'm very glad indeed that you decided to stay on the job; thank you again and again!" The letter, dated June 22, was the first item in Yokoyama's August column. It was titled, "Letter from a Dear Friend."

Dr. J.I. Frederick Reppun, the Hawaii Medical Journal's current editor and recently retired general practice physician, also appreciates Yokoyama's contributions to the Journal. "The Journal couldn't possibly survive without Dr. Yokoyama's 'News & Notes,' which readers relish the most," he said at the celebration.

"It's the most read section. Readers go right to it . . . I usually don't touch (edit) it. I leave it as is. He has a style of his own. I wouldn't want to change it," Reppun explained.

Yokoyama, who also heads the Hawaii Medical Association's publications committee, has had many opportunities to hone his writing style. It began at McKinley High School, where he was one of the managing editors of the Daily Pinion, the student newspaper. He also wrote a bi-monthly column in Japanese for The Hawaii Hochi from 1983 to 1986.

He says his wife of 46 years, Marjie, who retired a few years ago as a juvenile probation officer in the Family Court system, and his six children "gave" him the time to write his column. "No football games or baseball games," he said. "For my oldest daughter's wedding, I had to take off to finish the column before going to the party."

Despite their dad's busy schedule, the Yokoyama children often tagged along with him on hospital rounds or when he went in to his office. Those experiences influenced their lives. His children—Joanne Suzuki, a counselor at Mid Pacific Institute;

Larry, a family practice physician; Diane Yokoyama Larue, a veterinarian in Dallas; Roger, a dentist at Pali Momi Medical Center; Suzanne Lee, a Kaiser Permanente internist; and Harry Dunn Yokoyama, a science teacher at Campbell High School.

Yokoyama is "very proud" of his children. How did he contribute to their success? "Constant pushing," he said half-jokingly. "We're just fortunate."

Sharing his knowledge with others via the media is something Yokoyama has always done. In addition to the monthly "News & Notes" column, he and other physicians host a Japanese radio program on KZOO, which airs periodically. Each focuses on a particular topic, inviting listeners to phone in questions. Previously, he hosted similar shows on other broadcast stations.

Yokoyama also has an impressive track record of service to the community and country. He helped train physicians from Japan at Maluhia Hospital, when it was a facility for the chronically ill. Maluhia is now a long-term care facility. After graduating from McKinley High School in 1941, Yokoyama attended the University of Hawaii for two years.

He served in the U.S. Army from 1943 to 1946, graduating from military intelligence school at Camp Savage, Minnesota. He was assigned to the Joint Intelligence Center, Pacific Ocean Area. His 12 years of attending Japanese language school as a youth paid off. Yokoyama was ordered into service with the Fifth Amphibious Corps for the Iwo Jima campaign and the Kyushu landing. His work in translating for Japanese prisoners-of-war at Iwo Jima earned him a bronze star.

So, if you see Yokoyama with his pen and golf club in hand and have a good medical joke to tell, or news about a physician, be sure it reaches Dr. Henry Yokoyama. You might see it printed up in the next issue of the Hawaii Medical Journal. You'll be giving physicians worldwide something light to ponder. ■

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